

He passed through the midst of them and went away.

Today's Gospel reading about the inaugural sermon of Jesus given to the citizens of his hometown of Nazareth, reminds me of my inaugural classroom presentation as a high school freshman in 1941. It's very memorable to me because I had prior to that never had to stand before an audience (my classmates) and give a speech. It was during a religion class presided over by Brother Francis; he required this of each student during the semester – with focus on the life of some saint.

My saint was St. Anthony of Padua. I don't know why I took the assignment so seriously. At that age I wasn't given much to study, a very passive scholar. Nevertheless I researched the saint, found his story fascinating (lots of miracles, including preaching to a congregation of fishes in a pond), wrote out the text, memorized it and even had my mother sit through it as I stood upon a kitchen chair and proclaimed it for a full fifty minutes – before going to school.

I was the first to perform (others would deliver at subsequent classes) and so I stood before the blackboard – facing my classmates and Brother Francis (in the back) and began. I took up the whole hour – spoken as written. At the end Brother Francis came up to me and said: "I only wanted a ten minute survey. But I didn't have the heart to stop you."

I'm sure Jesus as a mature adult (not to mention being the "Son of God") was much more spontaneous and spoke with more authority than I could at my age (although he does quote a long passage from the scroll in front of him). And what he quoted was a prophecy about liberty and vision and how he himself came to fulfill that prophecy right then and there!

But – in keeping with the nature of Scripture reading – was he not there also as a model of how you and I should stand before our world and proclaim and fulfill that same prophecy? Is Jesus just an isolated figure from long ago or is he not in some way also you and me – doesn't St. Paul say, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ as a garment"; clothe yourself in his way of Being? Stand up, get up on your kitchen chair, and speak in such a way as to save the world.

But of course don't stop there. For Scripture reading means: be the whole text! And so be aware of that resistance in you that hesitates, thinks up reasons for not taking the podium, listening to that anonymous voice within you that says, "Who do you think you are? You are a face in the crowd! Stay there. It's safer." In other words, if you look at the crowd in the subsequent verses of today's reading, you may see your own face just as reluctant to change, to see in Christ the son of Joseph and no other.

Get whole! Experience that whole episode. Know yourself.

Geoff Wood